

# [***The Best Way to End Hamas Requires a Ceasefire First | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BMT-BRT1-DY68-1002-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** It is disgraceful that so many people around the world—from U.S. academics to useless leaders in some Arab countries, all the way to sanctimonious Western journalists – continue to abet the fiction that Hamas fights for the Palestinians.

**Body**

In the days after the Oct. 7 [*Hamas*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/hamas?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) massacre, I argued on these pages that [*Israel should not rush to invade Gaza*](https://www.newsweek.com/israeli-ground-assault-would-gift-hamas-iran-opinion-1837958?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), but instead deploy the moral high ground to fast-track peace with Saudi Arabia and build pressure on the criminal jihadis who had attacked the Jewish State. That's not how things went.

Almost six months later, the result has been as ugly as predicted, with Israel causing massive civilian casualties due to Hamas using the 2.3 million Gazans as human shields as its fighters hole up in a 300-mile tunnel network built with perhaps a billion dollars stolen from the people.

Still, President [*Joe Biden*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/joe-biden?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and Vice President [*Kamala Harris*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/kamala-harris?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) were wrong to suggest in recent days that they categorically oppose an Israeli move into Rafah, the southern Gaza town which now is the last stronghold of Hamas and where a majority of the strip's people are huddled, in dire conditions.

Israeli Prime Minister [*Benjamin Netanyahu*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/benjamin-netanyahu?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) is also wrong when he reacts with seeming indifference and declares that Israel will do as it pleases. Not only does that project ingratitude toward Israel's strongest backer but it is also idiotic: first, Israel needs U.S. munitions', second, the reputational damage it has suffered is such that Biden is all that stands between Netanyahu and total global isolation.

After months of having Netanyahu reject his tireless efforts to organize an endgame, Biden, whose election prospects are suffering as a result, seems close to the brink. On Monday the United States did not veto a resolution calling for a cease-fire without conditioning it on a release of all the hostages, prompting Netanyahu to cancel a series of critical meetings that had been planned in Washington between U.S. officials and important Israeli figures, including Defense Minister Yoav Galant, who passes for the last voice of reason in Netanyahu's benighted Likud Party.

Biden clearly felt the need to ratchet up the pressure on the ungrateful Netanyahu, but ultimately the U.S. and Israel will need to find a way out of true catastrophe.

That way cannot be with any Hamas military still standing in Gaza, continuing to terrorize its long-suffering people.

It is disgraceful that so many people around the world—from U.S. academics to useless leaders in some Arab countries, all the way to sanctimonious Western journalists – continue to abet the fiction that Hamas fights for the Palestinians.

Hamas is a jihadi mafia that for more than 30 years has labored to prevent the creation of an independent Palestinian state, considering any compromise with the Jews to be an abomination under its twisted mutation of Islam.

Its method has been terrorism and rocket fire against Israelis in hopes of moving them to the political right, which lacks the vision to understand that Israel needs partition to survive demographically (Israel plus the Palestinian-populated areas is only half-Jewish). Thus, while Hamas is more vile than the Israeli right, it is also more intelligent and the two are weirdly symbiotic.

Hamas brought incredible devastation upon Gaza by invading Israel, massacring 1,200 people and kidnapping more than 200 on Oct. 7. But in the twisted calculus of jihadi ***politics***, if it retains a fighting force in any part of Gaza it will convince many people that it has won. This will perpetuate the agony of the entire strip, for it will spread again there like a cancer. It will also strengthen Islamic radicals everywhere, make Israeli-Palestinian peace truly impossible for decades more, and endanger the world (and not only the West, as Russian President [*Vladimir Putin*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/vladimir-putin?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) learned last Friday).

So, the last four battalions of Hamas—perhaps a fifth of its pre-war order of battle—must not survive intact in Rafah. But this course should be pursued strategically. While many smart people are engaged in the war, the political echelon has not impressed. So, I shall offer advice that also represents the widely held view among the strategy and military experts I speak to quite regularly in Israel.

* Every effort should be made to reach a ceasefire of four to six weeks, gaining the release of as many as possible of the 100-odd hostages, many of them foreign citizens, who are believed to still be alive in Gaza. Talks have been going on in Qatar for about a week with the involvement of the CIA Director William Burns.Whether or not such a deal is achieved, Israel should begin the process of allowing the displaced people from north of Rafah out of that enclave. Since they number more than a million and many of them no longer have homes to go to, it will be an enormous logistical and humanitarian undertaking that will require outside assistance, certainly from the UN and the Red Cross, but possibly others as well. Rafah residents should also be allowed out, if they wish.Obviously, no armed persons should be allowed out. Wanted men leaving would be arrested alive, if unarmed. The goal would be to isolate the armed fighters in Rafah among as few civilians as possible.Humanitarian aid and relief of every kind should be distributed with speed and generosity in the areas that are free of Hamas, outside Rafah. Israel is right to be cautious about delivering aid to areas where remaining Hamas operatives can commandeer it – but if this is not the context, the delays on the humanitarian front should be replaced by the efficiency Israelis excel at when they're not playing games.There is a pretty good argument for offering the Hamas leadership exile in whatever unfortunate place is willing to receive them in exchange for the remaining hostages and a laying down of arms. It's not clear if they would be interested, but it may be the best chance of survival for both them and the last of the Israeli hostages.

And after all this plays out, unless there is a Hamas surrender the U.S. should support Israel moving ahead on Rafah. There is one thing that Biden should demand of Netanyahu in exchange, and another that he should not.

Biden should certainly demand that Israel agree to a robust discussion of the day-after plan creating a civilian authority in Gaza, almost certainly constituting some variant or extension of the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority (which Hamas expelled from Gaza in 2007 in a coup). Netanyahu's stubborn refusal to do this is an outrage that has the military brass howling with anger; they are the ones who will be saddled with policing the inevitable insurrection.

Especially in an election year, I don't see how Biden can continue to abet this level of impossible behavior from Netanyahu, whose main concern appears to be buying time in power so he can engineer stalling tactics in his bribery trial.

At the same time, Biden should not pressure Netanyahu, or any other Israeli leader, to begin talks on the establishment of a fully independent Palestinian state. Responsible people in Israel know very well that this must be the outcome eventually. But Israel needs a post-war election in which the currently unpopular Netanyahu is mercifully ousted, and at the moment Israel's traumatized voters won't hear of a Palestinian state. Forcing that issue would give him a hardline case to deploy—and that could save him.

Israel pulled out of Gaza completely in 2005; it was, essentially, a Palestinian state. The result was that Hamas seized it from the Palestinian Authority in a coup less than two years later, turned it into a fortress with a brainwashed population, spent years firing rockets at Israel, and then staged an invasion that was the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust. The West Bank has autonomous zones but also an Israeli military presence – and none of those things occurred. It they had, Israel would have faced an enemy army on the very edge of its main cities, not in a southern hinterland surrounding Gaza.

This is the evil genius of Hamas. They wanted to convince Israelis not to allow a Palestinian state—and it has worked. Pressuring Israel to move forward on this now will only help Netanyahu cling to power. Deny him that gift, Biden.

*Dan Perry is the former Cairo-based Middle East editor and London-based Europe/Africa editor of the Associated Press. He served as the chairman of the Foreign Press Association in Jerusalem and wrote two books about Israel. Follow him at danperry.substack.com.*

*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2367703/humanitarian-aid-drops-gaza.jpg)

**Graphic**

Humanitarian Aid Drops Into Gaza

Amir Levy/Getty Images

Humanitarian aid falls from the sky toward the Gaza Strip as seen from a position on the Israeli side of the border on March 25, in southern Israel

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